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SUBJECT: LOCAL ELECTIONS SET FOR MAY 2008

REFS: BELGRADE 1719

Summary

¶1. (U) On December 29, after parliament passed supporting legislation, Serbia's Parliamentary Speaker called for local and provincial elections to be held in May 2008. Both the Democratic Party (DS) and the Democratic Party of Serbia (DSS) supported the legislation and election date. Setting a date for local elections was also the final step in fulfilling the implementation of Serbia's 2006 Constitution and avoided concerns that elections would not be called before the December 31 deadline, as envisioned in the Constitutional law. End Summary.

Laws Passed and Elections Scheduled

¶2. (U) On December 29, just hours after parliament passed the final pieces of legislation required to hold local elections, Parliament Speaker Oliver Dulic called for local and provincial elections to be held May 11, 2008. Preceding the call, Parliament adopted the necessary legislation on territorial organization, local self administration, local elections and the capital city, local media reported on December 30. The Radical Party (SRS) MPs abstained from voting on the legislation, according to parliamentary sources and media reports. The new legislation specifies that local elections will be held under a proportional party system with a five percent election threshold, with exemptions for national minority parties and coalitions. Under the new law on territorial organization, Serbia has 24 towns (including Belgrade), two autonomous provinces (Vojvodina and Kosovo) and 150 municipalities.

Spring Date Supported by Coalition Parties

¶3. (SBU) The spring election date had the support of the governing coalition, and permitted the Parliament to avoid a constitutional crisis by fulfilling its obligations to set a date before the end of 2007 (reftel). Bojan Pajtic of the Democratic Party (DS), who is the President of Vojvodina Executive Council, said he was pleased that parliament "performed its duty and called for local and provincial elections. I am pleased that we did not breach the legal framework," media reported December 30. Dragan Sormaz, Democratic Party of Serbia (DSS) MP, said it was important that parliament "respected the Constitution and that the majority supported these four laws which should significantly advance local self-administration, "according to media. DS MP Konstatin Samofalov told poloff on December 31 that he believed all parties supported the spring election date, since it would give them adequate time to prepare.

Comment

¶4. (SBU) With the date set for local elections, parties are now turning their attention to the more immediate concern of presidential elections, previously scheduled for January 20, 2008. The campaign is already in full swing and is quickly becoming a close race between President Boris Tadic of the DS and Tomislav Nikolic of the SRS. Post expects that the outcome of the presidential elections will strongly determine the strength of parties going into the spring local and provincial elections. Results from the May elections will also impact how post will be able to deliver assistance to municipalities, as we seek to engage with progressive democratic newly elected leaders on the local level. End Comment.

MUNTER